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TO THE  
ELECTORS OF GREAT BRITAIN

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SERIOUS REFLEXIONS  
ON A  
DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT.

BY  
AN ELECTOR.

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LEGI REGIQUE.

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THE

STATUTE BOOK OF GREAT BRITAIN

AND OF THE

IRISH PARLIAMENTS

FROM THE FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF KING WILLIAM THE THIRD TO THE PRESENT

BY

JOHN ELLIOT

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TO THE

ELECTORS, &c.

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THE present critical state of national affairs has so much occupied the attention of the public, that it cannot be thought unseasonable to submit to it, a few serious reflections on the expediency of dissolving the present Parliament, and on the principles



ciples which ought to direct us in our choice of Representatives for the next.

It is not now necessary to discuss the advantages or disadvantages of a Triennial Bill, or to examine the different opinions which have prevailed as to the best period of limiting the duration of Parliaments. Although the Septennial Act (by many learned men thought unconstitutional) still remains in force, yet few Parliaments have been suffered to expire by length of Time. Many good reasons may be given for putting an earlier end to their political Existence; and a few facts,



facts, fairly stated, will justify that Annihilation which the Nation now begins to expect.

The Existence of the Prerogative of the Crown to dissolve Parliament is too well established to admit even of a dispute. The wisdom of exercising this Prerogative has indeed been questioned in that Assembly where it ought last and least of all to be questioned. No Man, not even a British Senator, is the proper Judge of his own merits; and it is, in truth, an argument of some weight against the propriety of permitting the present House of Commons to exist, that, it has struggled

by desperate Resolves to prevent its own Diffolution. The desire of a Representative of the People to prolong his political Existence can only proceed from selfish motives. His inclination to resort to the constituent Body for its opinion with respect to his Character and Conduct in Parliament, denotes a consciousness that he meant at least to have promoted the Interest of the Public. A general Election is an appeal to the People, which no real Patriot ever shrunk from. If he has faithfully discharged his Trust, he knows that it is the Interest of his Constituents to renew their Confidence in him : he can even readily  
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presume, that their Candour will overlook the Errors of his Conduct, when their Judgement cannot but approve the motives that influenced it.—But we are not to be surpris'd that Men should tremble to appear before their Electors, who have boldly attempted, in their *legislative Capacities*, to take from them their Charters and their Property, and to invade those Prerogatives of the Crown, which are no less calculated to preserve the independence of the Subject, than of the Sovereign.

Frequent Parliaments are certainly best suited to the rational Principles of a free Government: it is not, however,  
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to be denied, that the great and continued Expences of frequent Elections, and the violent Heats and Animosities consequent thereon, have induced many worthy Men to acquiesce in the Septennial Act, as often as attempts have been made to repeal it. But, if the jarring Passions and contending Interests of factious Leaders (who in all ages have called themselves *the People*) have risen to an height dangerous to our Liberties; if the Lust of Power and Place has confounded the most honourable Connections in the Senate, every good Citizen will bear, with cheerfulness, the temporary inconvenience of a general Election, for the  
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fake of procuring a steady Government; and every opportunity will be pleasing to the Electors which enables them to reject those Members, who have betrayed their Interests; and to return others who are unprejudiced, unconnected, and willing to support an *honourable Union* of real Sentiments, and with it, a firm and vigorous Administration.

Whenever the House of Commons is divided into furious and unnatural Parties (the Public shall judge whether it is so divided at present), there cannot be a time more proper than such a time, for a Constitutional Appeal to

the People upon its Differences and Disputes. That Constitutional Appeal can only be made by calling upon the People to decide, in a new Election, who shall represent them. With a view, however, to prevent this Appeal, the maintenance of Public Credit is assigned as a ground of address against dissolving Parliament by those Men, who, for the last three months, have not found out or proposed any means to raise it. And the state of the East Indies is proposed as another ground by that House of Commons, which, some People think, has been willing to consider the East only as an Instrument of its own ambition,



bition, and disposed to form no Asiatic Regulations but such as are calculated to create in that House a permanent Interest, separate and distinct from that of the People at large. Unless another spirit can be infused into our Representatives (if such has been its disposition), it will be in vain to expect any reasonable Plan to come from that Majority which has fortunately failed in its attempts to reform *India*, by means which many sober men are persuaded would have ruined *Britain*.

The state of the East Indies does not call so loud for the instant interposition of Government as a late Ad-



dress pretends. The Carnatic has been evacuated, and peace, a profound peace, restored in Indostan. The present House of Commons has shewn itself unwilling to make any equitable regulations of the Government of India consistent with any of the known principles of the Constitution of this country. A new Parliament therefore must be resorted to. But a new Parliament, it has been said, if you admit that it will have better dispositions, must have so little information which qualifies the present for this important task of Indian reformation, that nothing can be *immediately* done: nothing ought to be *hastily* done, I shall

shall venture to assert, though the authors of desperate measures, who have resorted to every topic which could enforce the necessity of instant and unprincipled decision, may differ from me. Sifted however as this subject has lately been, there can hardly be a man in the kingdom who is not as well informed of the state of India, and as well qualified to decide upon regulations which may be proposed, as the members of the present Parliament are at this moment, and much better than they were when the Bill lately rejected was first introduced into the House of Commons.

It is said your country is in a state of distraction. The Author of this Pamphlet is one among many thousands, who are persuaded that the causes of that confusion, which, when we are at Peace with Foreign Powers, must be merely *internal*, will cease with the existence of those for whose dissolution he is an advocate.

The history of the two last sessions is no less extraordinary than the Coalitions which have been formed in them ; conduct and professions, practice and principles, have been totally irreconcilable with each other ; it has been thought more *consistent* to associate

ciate with the objects of the most pointed invectives than to impeach them for the sake of public example ; and it has been found *easier* to censure war and peace than to make them ; influence, which was once the subject of the most patriotic animadversions, has been vindicated in a more dangerous form by the *same* tongue, which damned it—Connections have been founded not on the pure principles of the *idem sentire de Republicâ*, not of public character, but on the grounds of a *corrupt parliamentary influence* : a worthy nobleman has fairly stated that public character ought to be the constitutional road

road to office, but at the same time he has assisted in bringing into it a *public Character* which not in one single instance, but in a long series of mal-administration, he has himself condemned: in one word, there has been a connection between republican Whigs and high-flying Tories. From so much palpable self-contradiction is it unreasonable to infer, that the present House of Commons wants a *sound vital principle*? from so much palpable self-contradiction would not a dissolution be the best deliverance?

It has been already observed, that among the reasons which may render

it expedient in the Crown to dissolve Parliament, the attempt lately made to bring under its *own immediate* controul and disposition the total Administration of all India, is a powerful one—The ambition which has been disclosed by the Author of that Bill has raised a general alarm for the salvation of the country ; and the nation now gratefully reveres the spirit and the wisdom of that House, which rejected it. Its very being was indeed at stake, for when the Throne is attacked, the Peers are bound more immediately to support it ; if it falls, they must be buried under its ruins. But it must be stated as a reason yet more decisive

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in favour of this step, that although we are for the present delivered from the consequences of that Bill, the same ambition still remains, aided by the same confederates, whose zeal is not diminished in the least, but probably increased by disappointment. The Author of that Bill has declared his resolution to bring into the House of Commons another, the same in purport, and no otherwise different, than merely with some such alteration in the Title, as shall put the House in a capacity to receive and to pass it. To check such attempts, and to break such a confederacy, nothing can be so effectual as a dissolution of its legislative



gislative power, “ if nothing,” says  
 Mr. Justice Blackstone\*, “ had a right  
 “ to prorogue or dissolve a Parliament  
 “ but itself, it might happen to be-  
 “ come perpetual ; and this would be  
 “ extremely dangerous, if at any time  
 “ it should attempt to encroach on  
 “ the executive power ; as was fatally  
 “ experienced by the unfortunate King  
 “ Charles the First, who, having un-  
 “ advisedly passed an act to continue  
 “ the Parliament then in being till  
 “ such time as it should please to dis-  
 “ solve itself, at last fell a sacrifice to  
 “ that inordinate power which he

\* Book I. ch. ii. page 188.

“ himself had consented to give them.”

That the late East India Bill was a most daring attempt to encroach on the executive power, no man will now venture to deny ; that it would have probably tended to annihilate it, few men doubt. Is it not therefore just that the Crown should annihilate that House which made such an attempt ? Is it not self-preservation ? Is not this the crisis described in the above passage from the Commentaries on the Laws of England ? Much has been said with respect to the voice of the people on this subject ; testimonies of their disapprobation of the conduct of that House have been required to

warrant

warrant its dissolution. What were the Petitions from the Directors and Proprietors of the East India Company? What was the Petition from the Corporation of London? There is not perhaps a Corporation in the kingdom, which would not have petitioned against that Bill, if its contents had been fully known. The precipitation, with which it was hurried through the House of Commons, argues the conscious guilt of those who planned it. When the greatest trading company, and the first commercial city in the world, so publicly expressed, as they have done, their dread at the passing a Bill of such importance to

the rights individual as well as corporate of every subject in the British empire, they cannot be supposed to regret, and most undoubtedly would rejoice at the Dissolution of that House which passed it. That the East India Bill was passed by a very great majority renders the existence of that House the more dangerous ; after having passed such a Bill, what will not such a Majority attempt even against the Peers, the Crown, and the People?—If this Reasoning is founded on facts, no man in the Kingdom, except a Member of the House of Commons, will lament its Dissolution.

There

There is a passage in Dean Swift's works \* which seems so directly applicable to the present Crisis, that it may be well worthy the attention of the Public, and particularly the House of *Commons*: " This<sup>d</sup> encourageth me  
 " to hope (said the Dean) that, during  
 " the present lucid Interval, the Mem-  
 " bers, retired to their Homes, may  
 " suspend awhile their *acquired com-*  
 " *plexions*; and, taught by the Calm-  
 " ness of the Scene and the Season,  
 " re-assume the Sedateness of their  
 " Temper. If this should be so, it

\* Contests and Diff. in Athens and Rome,  
 ch. 5,



“ would be wise in them, as indivi-  
 “ dual and private Mortals, to look  
 “ back a little upon the Storms they  
 “ have *raised*, as well as those they  
 “ have *escaped*; to reflect, that they  
 “ have been Authors of a new and  
 “ wonderful thing in *England*;  
 “ which is, for a House of Commons  
 “ to lose the universal Favour of the  
 “ Numbers they represent: to observe,  
 “ how those whom they thought fit to  
 “ persecute for Righteouness sake, have  
 “ been openly caressed by the People;  
 “ and to remember, how themselves  
 “ sat in fear of their Persons from po-  
 “ pular Rage. Now, if they would  
 “ know the Secret of all this unprece-  
 “ dented

“ dented Proceeding in their *Masters*;  
 “ they must not impute it to their  
 “ freedom in Debate, or declaring their  
 “ opinions; but to that unparliamen-  
 “ tary abuse of setting Individuals  
 “ upon their Shoulders, who were  
 “ hated by God and Man. For, it  
 “ seems, the Mass of the People, in  
 “ such Conjunctions as this, have  
 “ opened their Eyes, and will not en-  
 “ dure to be governed by *Clodius* and  
 “ *Curio*, at the Head of their *Myrmi-*  
 “ *dons*; although these be ever so  
 “ numerous, and composed of their  
 “ own Representatives.” This Para-  
 graph will, it is hoped, lead to very  
 serious Reflections on the danger of a  
 Major-



Majority of the House of Commons being suffered to exist in opposition to the wishes of the People.

Among the many political Heresies of these times, one curious position is, that the Minister, who advises the King to dissolve the Parliament against the sense of the House of Commons, deserves censure, nay perhaps Impeachment. This would not have been noticed, if it had not been advanced by a popular Leader. The position means neither more nor less than this, that every Man is to be censured, who gives advice to the King, *except that popular Leader*; and his advice would have been to pass  
a Bill

a Bill to render the Crown unworthy the royal Brows of him who wears it. Such advice would have been as treacherous as that which was given Charles the First, when he passed those Acts which brought him to the Block. Thanks to the Lords, it has been frustrated. To censure the Advice, is to check the Exercise of, and indirectly to deny, that which the Confederates want to destroy, the Prerogative of the Crown to dissolve Parliament.

Another heretical Doctrine, more prevalent in the present than in any former House of Commons, is, that the end and intent of Delegation is to

set up one Minister, and to pull down another. The influence of the House of Commons, on the appointment of Ministers, has begot in some Members the wild Idea, that they have derived from us a Power to dictate to the King what set of Men he ought to employ ; but it does not require much argument to prove, that if the choice of Ministers is confined to one or two Men, and a *Majority* should determine to resist the Measures of every other Person appointed by the Crown, that the executive Government of this Country would be divested out of that *single Person*, in whom it has been immemorially placed by general consent, for the general good. The  
office

office of King would cease to exist, and that Majority would in fact become *Sovereign*. In such a Crisis there is no other alternative than a Dissolution of the Crown, or a Dissolution of such an House of Commons. It is painful to a peaceable Subject to reflect, that he lives in those days when it is necessary to state this alternative which the Constitution has taught him : but Truth and Justice call upon him to state it. To suppose that the King would nominate a servile Favourite, the mere object of his whim, for the Minister of Britain, or that an House of Commons would acquiesce in such a nomination, is no less absurd than to

suppose a British Monarch is bound to receive into his Service the Leader of any particular Set of Men; nay, it is as absurd as to suppose, that he should retain in it a Minister whose Measures would have led him to his own Destruction. The discretionary Power of appointing and opposing lies between the two Extremes. Neither the choice of Men, nor the opposition to them, ought to be merely personal. Moderate *Whigs* and moderate *Tories* have always thought the privilege of examining into the Conduct of evil Counsellors, impeaching and punishing them, sufficient to preserve the Liberties of the People; that a bad Minister  
of



of the King, is much less to be dreaded than a bad Minister of the *House of Commons*, against whom the People can have no redress, but in the Exercise of that Prerogative which has, therefore, been providentially vested in the Crown, to defeat the views of a self-interested Senate,

It does not yet appear that there is any intention to violate the Septennial Act by prolonging the duration of Parliament beyond Seven Years, although the Legislature can do it with the same justice that it violated the Triennial Act. The House of Commons will for the present (we are told) be con-

tent with being permitted to continue during the remainining Term of its Constitutional Existence. But the four Years, for which time the entire Patronage of the East Indies was to have been vested in certain *Nominees*, might be found to be a period in which one Man might contrive effectually to fix himself for Life in Administration. In a less space of Time the long Parliament of Charles the First, which began also by assuming *Sovereign Executive Powers*, brought down upon their Fellow-subjects all the Horrors of a Civil War, which not only destroyed the King and Lords, but at length terminated in the abolition



tion of the House of Commons itself, *by one of its own creatures.* The first Session of the long Parliament deserves the most sincere Gratitude from Posterity, for having abolished the High Commission Court, and the Court of Star Chamber, and for having effected many other very salutary Regulations. The second Session of the present Parliament will be no less gratefully remembered, for having put an end to a corrupt Administration and an unfortunate contest with our late Colonies, for having abolished the Boards of Trade and Green Cloth, for having passed the Contractors Bill, and for having, by many other prudent Laws,

restored

restored the Independence of the British Commons. Thus far the Aims and the Struggles of both were just and honourable; but there is a line beyond which to pass is Death or Anarchy: and if the time is come, or shall come, when the House of Commons does not know where to stop, it ought to be dissolved. The Act for the perpetual Parliament was fatal to the Legislature which made it; and the great Historian of those Times, in his observations upon it, says: "That it  
 " removed the Land-marks, and de-  
 " stroyed the Foundation of the King-  
 " dom." *Some* late proceedings fo

\* Clar. Hist. book III. p. 261.

strongly

strongly mark the Will of the House of Commons to continue its own duration, and some late Resolutions, the *purposes* for which they wish to continue it, that unless our Representatives recollect themselves, and see through the Aims of those who have led them on to the measures they have adopted ; the Prerogative of dissolving Parliament was never more necessary than at present, to the safety of the Crown, and never could be exerted more beneficially for the People.

There can be no doubt, that in the *middle* of a Parliament, when the Members are most apt to forget  
F their

their Constituents, circumstances may concur to render a Dissolution expedient; it is to be hoped, there never will be a Minister so timid as not to adopt and to advise it, when these circumstances do concur. Danger alone calls forth great Abilities into Exertion, and then are the Virtues of those Representatives, who really possess the Confidence of the People, fully displayed. That Man deserves every thing of his Country, who boldly ventures to stand forth the Champion of its Constitution against every ambitious Confederacy that appears in the Kingdom; and who, by dissolving Parliament (when he thinks it ought to

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be dissolved), calls for the Decision, not of the House of Commons, but of the People at large upon the Propriety of his Conduct.

The good People of England are no less renowned for their Loyalty, than a zealous Attachment to their Rights and Liberties. The Constitution has accurately marked out the Prerogatives of the Sovereign, and the Privileges of the Subject ; and our History furnishes striking Instances of faithful Allegiance, and firm Resistance to regal Authority. If, therefore, the question ever arises, whether an Administration shall be appointed by the supreme

Magistrate subject to the *controul*, not the *Direction*, of the House of Commons, if there should be a struggle to *master* the Crown : let not the Minister hesitate in such a crisis, if such a crisis ever takes place, to dissolve Parliament ; let him appeal to the people, and he may be assured that they would shew their loyalty by rejecting those Candidates who attempted to encroach on the executive power to the danger of public and constitutional Liberty ; that they would withdraw their confidence from those who had been ready to lay violent hands on *private* property ; and that they would display their allegiance by supporting such

men



men as feel their own Interest *inseparable* from that of a Prince wishing to secure his for the purpose of protecting theirs.

Thus much on the expediency of dissolving Parliament : permit an elector to subjoin a few Reflections with respect to the choice of Representatives.

There is no subject with regard to which Passion and Interest, public and private motives oftener clash and interfere, than the Preference which is due to one Candidate more than another. It would be unpardonable to  
 reject

reject the solicitations of friendship or connection in any other than a public cause. Gratitude to an individual must give way to the welfare of the state. In the hour of danger, and in the day of trial, freemen will decide upon public principles, and determine their choice of men according to the *complexion* of the times. If hasty strides are making to bring *the Crown* into compleat subjection, the present crisis requires an House of Commons more ready to uphold, than to reduce its prerogative. A premature Dissolution will doubtless excite the meanest elector to enquire into the cause, and to know the real Authors of it. The  
*true*

*true cause* then is the *introduction* of the East India Bill into the House of Commons, not the *rejection of it* by the House of Lords ; and the *real* Author of it, *the Man* who introduced it. In the consideration of that Bill has been involved the *cause* of an antient limited Monarchy, protecting the Rights of the people beyond any other known system of human policy. The Author of it boldly declared that he would risque his character on its merits. The nation decides against its merits, and of course against *that* character. His Majesty, judging, as his People judge, of the Bill, has not thought proper to confide longer in a Minister, who,

under

under the pretext of abolishing Asiatic Despotism, brought in this Bill, which indirectly tended to controul the Crown he served, and to affect the dearest Rights of the People, which the Crown is bound to watch over. If therefore there should be a Dissolution, the electors will determine whether the late change in Administration, and the consequent Dissolution, are to be ascribed to closet intrigue and secret influence, or the well-grounded apprehensions for the safety of the King and People, arising from *encroachments* on the executive power, meditated and attempted *by its own servants* ; and from a project to convert

vert its necessary influence against itself, and against the people. When they have determined, they will express their judgment by supporting, or withholding their support from those, who voted for the East India Bill.

That Bill has at length opened our eyes ; we can now see the real characters of Men, and it is according to the *votes* which they have given that we can best judge of their pretensions to our future confidence. By that, and the many other great national questions which have been decided within the last two years, every Member of

Parliament has been fairly put to the trial of his wisdom and integrity. An obstinate perseverance in the American war, shewed the foresight of those who would sacrifice Britain for the visionary prospect of recovering her late colonies. The peace, which was approved of by the merchants trading to the East and West Indies, and the City of London, though not indeed by the *majority* of the House of Commons, manifested some anxiety at least to supply, by the return of Commerce, the loss we have sustained by the dismemberment of the Empire ; and, lastly, the East India Bill fully discriminated between the real

Friends



Friends of the Constitution, and the Confederates against it.

If an observer was disposed to arrange in classes the present Representatives of the People, he might with very little variation of character divide them in the following manner :

The *first class*, he would say, is a corps well experienced in the arts of Division, which, having received all of them their wages, and many their political existence from the Minister who prosecuted the American war, still thinks itself bound to support him : this class persevered to the last in the

American measures, opposed every species of reform, and every effort to reduce the inordinate influence of the Crown, censured the peace which *their war* had rendered necessary ; and, lastly, supported the India Bill.

The *second*, he would observe, chiefly consists of very desperate Whigs, leagued under a Leader, of whom it may be doubted whether he is not more dangerous *in* than *out* of Place ; who has had few scruples as to the means of attaining power, and fewer still as to the mode of preserving it. Whilst his great abilities were displayed in opposing bad Ministers,

bad Measures, and the overgrown Influence of the Crown, the Country gave him the credit of acting upon the purest principles; but when his inordinate ambition was discovered, and he began to invade the rights of his fellow-subjects, and to aim at establishing for himself a greater influence than the Crown ever had, the Public began to question his principles; and they are at length satisfied, that a Minister, who is not the Friend of the *just* prerogatives of the Crown, cannot be the Friend of the People.

These two classes have joined their Force under an arbitrary *Duumvirate*,  
and

and their first characteristic attempt has been, under the specious form of an India Bill, to *proscribe* both King and Constitution.

The third class, he would tell you, is a small Band of honest Men, among whom are to be found the Names of *Powis, Pitt, Honeywood, Astley, and Wray*, Men who have strenuously contended against the exorbitant Influence of the Crown, without attempting to assume it to themselves. When they have opposed a Minister, they have acted from a Conviction of the badness of his Measures; and when they have supported new Ministers, their Conduct

duct has been regulated by an honest Inclination to give them a fair Trial; and, lastly, they have, with abhorrence, reprobated the principles of the East India Bill.

To sustain, to strengthen, and to increase this Band, is the Duty of all who are entrusted with the Right of Voting for Representatives. The prudent Exercise of this Franchise becomes every Day more important, and more necessary, as the state of Representation becomes more defective. In some Boroughs, the Spirit of Election is quite gone; in others, enslaved. It is therefore necessary for the independent



dent Towns and Counties to be more circumspect in the choice of Members, not merely adverting to their Wealth and Connection, but electing Men who have Abilities to bear down the *Nominees* of the Great and Powerful. The House of Commons is, indeed, sometimes very much enlightened by the persons who are sent into it by the poorest Electors, influenced in their voices by the great Men whose Vassals they are. But it is universally allowed, that our national Virtue and Prosperity depends on the united Efforts of those Men who are mutually connected with us *by actual Election and real Choice.*

These,



These, my Countrymen, are the genuine sentiments of an Elector, who would enjoy, with thankfulness, in silence, the Blessings of that profound Peace which now prevails in every quarter of the world, if our intestine Tumults and Divisions did not render an appeal to the Publick necessary. The shortness of the present Recess of Parliament argues an impatience in the late Ministers to regain their Places. To this principle too we may attribute an Enquiry into the state of the Nation. If they succeed, we must naturally expect that Demands of *Peerages* will be insolent, and irresistible;

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that

that Resentment will furnish *other India Bills*, and other Schemes, alike fatal to the Crown and the Country : *Dii potius avertant !* A Minister is called forth from that House, where his Name, his Abilities, and unblemished Character, are highly revered ; whose Zeal (whether judicious is not now the question) to reform the State of our Representation has at least displayed an unfeigned hereditary Love for the People ; and whose Anxiety to rescue the King from being imposed on, has demonstrated his regard for an ancient Constitution : whether he is to be supported, ought to depend on the Rectitude of the Measures he

means to pursue ; he ought at least to be fairly tried. If that Trial ought to be made, and if it cannot be made unless a new Parliament is called ; if the Authors of the late India Bill must be forced again into office, by Majorities acting against what we, who are out of the House, know to be the universal wish of the People at large, unless that new Parliament is called : You and I are bound most earnestly to pray, that he, who may constitutionally say it, will say, PROVOCO AD POPULUM.

F I N I S.











